

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Boating

REFUGE NAME: Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715d)

REFUGE PURPOSE: "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (16 U.S.C. §715d)

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM:

To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. (16 U.S.C. §3901(b))

DESCRIPTION OF USE

(a) What is the use? Visitors launch and land non-motorized canoes and kayaks from the refuge boat ramp located across from parking lot #1. Waterfowl hunters launch and land motorized boats during the waterfowl hunting season. The use takes place on navigable tidal water within the boundaries of the Refuge. **Is the use a priority public use?** This activity is not specifically a priority public use however it is a means or conveyance for two priority public uses to take place (wildlife observation and hunting).

(b) Where would the use be conducted? Watercraft are launched from the Refuge's boat launch site which is across from parking lot #1. The kayaks and canoes can then paddle into the estuary's tidal areas which are considered navigable waters. Landings on other areas of the Refuge salt marsh are not allowed. Waterfowl hunters launch their motorized watercraft and travel to hunting areas A and B, located across Plum Island Sound, in the western portion of the Refuge.

(c) When would the use be conducted? Non-motorized boating generally occurs during the warmer months of the year, (May to October). Motorized boating occurs during the waterfowl hunting season (October to February).

(d) How would the use be conducted? Since the Refuge is surrounded by navigable water, boats can pass through the Refuge if originating from outside but can not land. The only legal entry into the Refuge is through the entrance gate. Boats that launch from the Refuge carried by vehicle must pass through the entrance gate and either pay the entry fee or purchase a Refuge pass or Federal duck stamp. Kayaks / canoes can be dropped off at the boat launch but vehicles must park in parking lot #1.

(e) Why is this use being proposed? There is a lack of launch sites for non-motorized boats specifically kayaks and canoes within the Plum Island area including the mainland.

The Refuge is providing its boat launch to facilitate wildlife observation associated with this activity to take place. The majority of paddlers are able to access the salt marsh and its tidal areas primarily to view wildlife and take advantage of the good paddling afforded by this area. Interpretive programs are also conducted by kayak to introduce visitors to the natural resources of the estuary.

Motorized boating facilitates access to hunting areas A & B for the purpose of waterfowl hunting. Area A is accessible by boat only.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES: The Refuge has a boat launch area across from parking lot #1 which provides access to the salt marsh and tidal navigable waters. A large parking lot with seasonal restrooms is also available across the road from the boat launch. Users must pay the entry fee or have a current Refuge pass or Federal duck stamp. The parking lot is on a first come first serve basis and can become filled to capacity during the busy summer months. This activity is within the budget and staffing capabilities of the Refuge to manage.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE: Some disturbance to wildlife occurs as visitors paddle non-motorized watercraft into the tidal waterways adjacent to the salt marsh. Level of impact is unknown, but deemed to be minor. Kayak/canoe activity is lower during the greenhead fly season which occurs primarily during the month of July. Motorized boats may disturb wildlife while crossing Plum Island Sound or accessing the hunting areas, however the level of this public use is relatively low, the activity occurs outside of the breeding season, and the disturbance is temporary. The majority of this activity is judged to be wildlife oriented as it directly supports two priority public uses, wildlife observation and hunting.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

This Compatibility Determination is provided for public comment for a 14-day period, from December 15 to 29, 2004. Availability of the draft CD is advertised through a legal notice in the local newspaper, press release, flyers at the Refuge entrance gate and other public areas, and through the Refuge's web site.

DETERMINATION (check one below):

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible with the Following Stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

- Level of use will be monitored to ensure any disturbance of wildlife is kept at a minimum.
- Large user groups will be controlled or restricted.
- Visitors must comply with U.S. Coast Guard boating regulations.

- Visitors are informed by an information sheet and Gate Staff that landing anywhere on the Refuge is not allowed with the exception of the boat launch site, or Areas A & B for the purpose of waterfowl hunting.

Signature – Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence – Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and date)

Mandatory 10 – year Reevaluation Date: _Dec 31, 2009_____